

## resenha do livro

# SASSEN, SASKIA (2010), TERRITORIO, AUTORIDAD Y DERECHOS: DE LOS ENSAMBLAJES MEDIEVALES A LOS ENSAMBLAJES GLOBALES, MADRID: KATZ

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### ABSTRACT

This review analyzes Saskia Sassen's book "Territorio, autoridad y derechos: De los ensamblajes medievales a los ensamblajes globales". The general question the book elaborates on is: How to study and theorize foundational transformations in and of complex systems? Globalization has become a veritable keyword of our time, but its relation to the processes of denationalization within the nation-state as principal trigger of this process remains undertheorized. Sassen's argument concentrates on the idea that the national paves the way for the global. By analyzing the three socio-political components territory authority and rights, through the analytical categories tipping points, capabilities and organizing logics, the sociologist follows their changes and interactions in three historical eras, the medieval, the national and the global realm. Given the complex frameworks the transformations operate in, it is pointed out that the interdependencies of the denationalization processes require a historical approach to overcome one-sided analytical perspectives.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** assemblages, denationalization, globalization, nation-state

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How to study and theorize foundational transformations in and of complex systems? The debates over globalization have taken many forms and dimensions. The interconnectedness in the global system increases what sociologist Saskia Sassen identifies as the challenge to make sense the most complex in-

stitutional architecture ever produced. Her point of departure is rooted in the conjuncture of approaches that seek to answer how to best define and research globalization, questioning its constitutive aspects but also the interaction of the institutions and economic, political and social structures behind it.

In favor of a grounded theory perspective, in “Territorio, autoridad y derechos: De los ensamblajes medievales a los enssamblajes globales”, Sassen addresses this from a perspective embedded in economic sociology and the attempt to face the issue straightforward, going beyond the traditional disciplinary boundaries. That said, the problem is considered from various angles: First, the emergence of the globalization paradigm brings with it consequences for theory and research, resulting in a growing need for social science to develop a more integrate explanatory framework and greater levels of abstraction. Second, in line with approaches such as the methodological nationalism, the author calls for a reassessment of the traditional perspective in social sciences reducing the nation-state as a single time-space category of analysis.

Her main point is that the national realm is one of the key instances that constitutes the globalization process. Given these initial clarifications, Sassen develops an analytical lens to trace the cross-border dynamics and the transnational networks involved, emphasizing a new global geography where supranational and sub-national structures are intertwined and dependent on each other. Here, she locates the explanation for the denationalization process: The national paves the way for the global. Moreover, the insistence on the various micro-processes as constitutive elements of globalization, that denationalize what has been constructed nationally such as urban spaces, capital and policies will shape the argumentative construct throughout the book.

Introducing the analytical terminology used by the author, the corpus of “Territorio, autoridad y derechos: De los ensamblajes medievales a los enssamblajes globales”, establishes a three dimensional approach to decipher the issue:

First, one dimension used is the historical delimitation divided into three eras: The medieval the national and the global. Second, the analytical dimension chosen is shaped by three elements: capabilities, organizing logics and tipping points. Capabilities imply the consideration of the impact and form of three components of political and social organization, referred to as TAR: Territory (T), Authority (A) and Rights (R)<sup>2</sup> in a certain historical era; organizing logics shape the way TAR are assembled; tipping points imply the relation between foundational historical events during the transformation process. Third and as the title of the book reveals, another dimension contains the constitutive parts of the assemblages: territory, authority and rights.

Encompassing nearly any society, the components assess what the author calls the three major historical assemblages: the medieval, the national and global. At this point, Sassen's terminology merits some clarification. In a general manner, then, "assemblages" are used without any theoretical foundation, but in a descriptive way. How one might proceed to develop such an approach? Sassen's work goes a considerable way to achieve a conceptual integration. She argues that an account of globalization must be historical. From the very start, the method of approximation chosen involves a comparative method to examine a set of trans-historical variables.

These descriptive, conceptual and methodological conditions frame the book. Chronologically, the historical assemblages chosen align with the inner organization of the book. Within the three dimensional approach taken by the author, the book is divided into three parts: The guiding question of the first part assesses how the national assembled, in the second part how the national was disassembled and third, how the global (digital) assemblages are constituted.

The empirical evidence Sassen relies on a large set of case studies rooted principally in the United States and Europe. The task is set: The development of an integrated strategy to understand the contemporary institutional transformation allows

<sup>2</sup>The English original works with „territory, authority and rights“ (TAR), the Spanish edition of this book uses the translation “territorio, autoridad y derechos”.

assessing how particular elements of TAR become reassembled into novel global configurations at present. TAR is used to analyze what the author calls the master categories; namely, the national and the global. Examining the way in which different political assemblages across time and space institutionalize the organization of territory, governing authority and political membership, the nation is a crucial point of analysis.

In the first part, “El ensamblaje de lo nacional”, the sociologist traces how the national state was created out of feudal elements and how the TAR became assembled and formed. The economic activities, the creation of institutions with their judicial frameworks and instruments were fundamental to the establishment of a national project, creating autonomy of the European cities and the institutionalization of national capitalism. The development of bureaucracy and consequently the standardization of taxation, the notion of sovereign power and its abstraction into materialities and the establishment of urban territoriality within a system of citizenry as triggers for secular government underline the micro-processes operating in interconnected networks at different levels of institutionalization. Particularly, with reference to Sassen’s thesis of “global cities”, the medieval city is seen as important variable of the emergence of transformations, creating the conditions to capture the dynamics of contemporary cities and the formations of new socio-political actors, dialoguing with contributions of Braudel, Polanyi and Wallerstein.

In the second part, “El desensamblaje de lo nacional”, Sassen’s main point is to show how the new alignments can be traced back in the assembling and disassembling of the constitutive elements. Her principal argument is the formation of a new logic triggering the emergence of international capabilities. Sassen debates that globalization did not arise with the Bretton Woods institutions in the 1940s, but in the 1970s. However, the author links the importance of the Marshall Plan and Bretton Woods to the development of capacities that led to the development of the tipping point of TAR.

Efforts of the Bretton Woods institutions in building and protecting the interests on a national level implied the development of international activities. In this perspective, the extension of the national state in the twentieth century occurs in a rather dynamic way, in contrast to the interaction of the past. Sassen adopts a macro-perspective, which finds its conceptual foundations in the World-System analysis, guiding the argumentative structure throughout the book. Although, in terms of her approach of theorizing based on the integration of empirical research and history, her conceptual dialogue mediates between a middle-range theory approach and world-system analysis, adding the premise that the global scale demonstrates foundational differences compared to earlier scales.

The denationalization of national capabilities is the principal category of analysis used to dissect the transformation. Moreover, the development of new forms of private authority assign new qualities to the public-and private domain, resulting in the consolidation of the private market in Western societies and the new power relations within the global. Consequently, legal frameworks were largely influenced by the increasing importance of the private interest, depicted as technical and neutral. This resulted in the importance of multinational corporations, building up within the nation-state the infrastructures and organizing logics for their global operations.

For all the reservations and misgivings, Sassen accepts the challenge to better understand the sustaining elements of liberal democratic theory. How did states incorporate market externalities, such as environmental damage, insufficient access to consumption and workers' rights, as evidenced through the Fordist contract and Keynesian policies? Moreover, what are the new logics constructed on which the private interest consolidates the emergence of its authority? Within the project of economic globalization, the construction of new operating logics outside the national realm require an institutional setting that permits transnational activity. The strategy relies on the fragmentation of particular state responsibilities

and their redistribution of certain operations to specialized agencies, the central banks or supranational institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and other members of the World Bank Group. Sassen establishes different strands of theorizing, elaborating particularly on the critique of global capitalism of scholars such as Harvey.

In the third part, “Ensamblajes de una era global y digital”, the author explores notions of citizenship and its interactions with work on transnational migration and digitalization, elaborating different approaches to transnationalism. With regard to citizenship, she argues that we are seeing a blurring in the distinctiveness of each subject in spite of the renationalizing of membership politics. Rooted in critical geography, the author delineates the heuristic notion of “las zonas fronterizas analíticas” (analytical borderlands) to overcome the binary perspective that characterizes many approaches in the field of globalization studies. The introduction of this perspective allows understanding the dynamics of simultaneous micro-processes and difficulty to capture the dynamics of globalization: For example, while parts of the economy are denationalized, parts of the immigration policy are renationalized.

Central to Sassen’s perspective is the understanding of transformation in terms of territoriality, encompassing cross-border geographies, the nation state, global cities, and cyberspace. Different forms of territoriality are a recurring element of several of her works. In the context of the present book, the author understands that territories that have been formerly reworked to become nationalized are being heavily influenced by globalization, going beyond the legal order of the nation-state. Intrinsically connected to national economic interests, the re-elaboration of the states’ interests are oriented and motivated to global economic dynamics, creating new spacial scales. In “Territorio, autoridad y derechos: De los ensamblajes medievales a los enssamblajes globales”, the city represents a strategic site for the new socio-political re-configurations intertwined with the denationalization process.

In this sense, the frameworks in which the modern economy, politics and society operate imply the possibility to practice new forms of citizenship that include various aspects: Different forms of membership and the emergence of human rights, environmental struggles, transnational identities and what Sassen calls the production of “presence” of those without power. Her theoretical construct occurs under the umbrella of the transnational perspective and is based on contributions such as Benhabib and Kymlicka.

From a Eurocentric perspective, Sassen discerns the category of denationalization based on the understanding of different network dynamics as articulating connection between the power regimes, temporalities and spaces. The analysis of digital networks goes beyond the internet but recognizes the efforts of theorizing digital networks within their insertion in the public and private spheres, incorporating the networks of global finance corporations and transnational digital civil society movements. It is here where she refers to contributions of Castells on information technologies in the social sciences. With reference to her concept of counter-geographies, Sassen relates the formation of new global movements, to cross-border fluxes of capital and markets to the increase of transnational networks and migration.

Finally, the question that the book aims to answer is in its essence: How to study the transformation in and of complex systems? Far from advancing a final answer, the moral of the story is challenging: By assembling, disassembling and reassembling the dynamics that form this complex enigma, Sassen develops a framework of analysis that seeks to overcome the dualistic approaches, but includes a tri-dimensional perspective based on her incorporation of various disciplines of knowledge. With reference the time-space compression and sociological and historical materiality, her argument concentrates on the idea that the national triggers the way for the global.

Relatedly, she suggests that the interdependencies of the denationalization processes require a historical approach.



In light of the historical evidence provided, it is worth noting that Sassen understands the emergence of globalization as a development of certain capacities, that itself will create new conceptions and relations regarding the use of time and space. Overall, Sassen recovers the idea that the contemporary transformation of the organizational paradigms is happening due to a set of alignments with the organization of the nation-state and the transnational reality the states are inserted in and constitutive of.